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Employee Spotlight: Carlos Archuleta

Bring on the baritone



Photo caption: Carlos Archuleta as the character Tenorio experiences a tense moment during the performance of the opera interpretation of *Bless Me, Ultima*.

A crowded theater grows silent as two performers engage in a moment filled with tension. Carlos Archuleta of Nuclear Materials Science (MST-16) portrays Tenorio in Hector Armienta's *Bless Me, Ultima*, an opera based upon the novel by Rudolfo Anaya. Tapping into his acting acumen, Carlos channels the malicious personality of a saloon-keeper and likely warlock named Tenorio. Tenorio is an embodiment of evil, and throughout the opera he serves as the antagonist against Ultima, the story's main character. When Carlos begins to sing, his thundering voice reverberates across the crowd, delivering the menace of such a malevolent personality.

A talented and versatile baritone, as a youngster Carlos had a strong interest in music, but in a genre decidedly different than opera.

"When I was 12 years old, my cousin Jim turned me on to the heavy metal band Iron Maiden, and I was hooked," remembers Carlos. "I picked up the bass guitar and started to learn how to play it. Later, I joined a band to play hard-driving heavy metal music. I also liked to sing, but I really didn't think much of it."

A change in musical genre was around the corner, but Carlos had no idea it was coming.

"I had just finished training with the National Guard and had decided to go to New Mexico Highlands University," Carlos says. "I was studying at Highlands while playing bass guitar in a band. At the time, there was a production of the rock musical *Little Shop of Horrors*, and the music director couldn't find a voice for the character of Audrey the Plant. A friend of mine heard me singing backup vocals while playing in the band, and he arranged for me an audition with the music director. So, I sang for him and wound up doing the voice for the musical."

Carlos' musical career began to blossom when this same musical director asked him to perform in more musicals. But then came Carlos' first challenge when he was asked to perform the bass solo in Mozart's *Solemn Vespers for a Confessor*.

“I told the musical director that I did not know how to sing in that style,” Carlos recalls. “He told me, ‘just make fun of an opera singer and try it.’ And it worked!”



Photo caption: Carlos Archuleta portrays Conte Luna Verdi in the Italian opera *Il Trovatore* (“*The Troubador*”) by G. Verdi. Photo courtesy of Karen Cooper.



Photo caption: Carlos Archuleta performs the fool Tonio from the Italian opera *Pagliacci*, sponsored by Opera Southwest.

Taking the stage

Performing the bass solo opened up Carlos’ musical imagination while pursuing a master’s degree at the New England Conservatory in Boston, MA. He secured an instructor who began cultivating his vocal talent, challenging him not only to refine his voice but also channel emotion. Carlos began to sing various operas, many of them in languages other than English. At first, he learned to sing the roles phonetically, but wanting to internalize the meaning of the words to channel their emotions to an audience, he began years of study to learn languages like French, Italian, Spanish, Russian and Czech.

“I’ve been singing professionally for about 25 years,” Carlos says. I retired from opera in 2010 or so because I wanted to raise my daughter. I am officially retired, but I still perform occasionally in New Mexico for organizations like Opera Southwest and the New Mexico Performing Arts Society.”

During his career, Carlos visited numerous places in the United States and then traveled to Europe, where he took the stage in places like France, Italy and England.

“I sang at the Royal Albert Hall in London,” Carlos says. “Walking into that building was stunning — it has more than 4,000 seats. And when you walk into the dressing area, they have portraits of all the famous people who have performed there. Of course, I was attracted to the legendary rock bands, like Pink Floyd and Deep Purple. It was a very exciting experience for me.”

Although retired, Carlos cannot help but take to the stage occasionally, particularly when he is asked by local organizations like Opera Southwest or the New Mexico Performing Arts Society.

“It’s difficult, making room for opera while balance my work and home lives, but I admit I miss being on stage,” says Carlos. “So, when I was given an opportunity to play Tenorio in *Bless Me, Ultima*, how could I say no? I mean, we all grew up with those books [by Chicano literature’s Rudolfo Anaya], and for me it was an honor to create the role of Tenorio for the stage.”



Photo caption: Carlos Archuleta performs the role of chief of police Baron Scarpia in the violent Italian opera *Tosca*. Photo courtesy of Lance Ozier.



Photo caption: Taking the stage at the Santa Fe Opera, Carlos Archuleta performs the role of Achillas Handel in the *opera seria* (Italian for “serious opera”) *Giulio Cesare in Egitto* (“*Julius Caesar in Egypt*”) by G. F. Handel.

The fulfillment of it all

Pull Quote: “I really enjoy getting into the role of some of these characters, to bring them to life before an audience. I like the sense of history behind these roles, as well as the performers who came before me and how they approached the part. Then there’s the thrill of being on stage, a full orchestra playing for you — the energy from the audience, it is something that cannot be replicated again.”

Traveling to sometimes exotic places may seem attractive, but anyone who has been on the road for any extent of time will tell you that the allure soon wears thin.

“At the peak of my career, I was on the road an average of 10 months out of the year,” Carlos explains. “It gets old fast, staying in hotel room or in other people’s houses. This vagabond lifestyle, it makes you miss home and family.”

As with most performers, Carlos takes on travel-related challenges just to live for the stage — it is here that he works to make a connection with the audience.

“That’s where all the hard work pays off,” Carlos notes. “It’s only a moment, one that doesn’t last long, but it is very satisfying when you can feel it.”



Photo caption: Carlos Archuleta performs as Figaro Rossini in the opera *The Barber of Seville*. An *opera buffa* (comedic opera), this masterpiece remains popular after making its debut more than 200 years ago.



Photo caption: Carlos Archuleta looks pensive in the role of Richard Nixon in the John Adams opera *Nixon in China*. Carlos performed this opera at the Minnesota Opera.

For the past five years, Carlos Archuleta has worked as a research technician for Nuclear Materials Science (MST-16).